(iv) It is necessary to introduce greater transparency and openness in the functioning of Government and public bodies. This will cover, for example, movement towards a 'Right to Information Act.'

(v) Accountability should be interpreted in a larger sense in order to ensure public satisfaction and responsive delivery of services. For this purpose, a phased introduction of Citizens' Charter for as many service institutions as possible could be considered.

Upgrading of Agricultural Marketing Machinary

2847. SHRI R. SAMBASIVA RAO : Will the Minister of RURAL AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state :

(a) whether a conference of Ministers from different States and Union Territories was held on 29th to discuss the challenges and constraints involved in strengthening and upgrading agricultural marketing machinery in the country;

(b) if so, the subjects discussed in the Conference;

(c) the number of Ministers attended the Conference; and

(d) if so, the details of the decisions arrived at?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RURAL AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI CHANDRADEO PRASAD VARMA) : (a) No Conference of Ministers from different States and Union Territories was held on 29th. However, a Conference of Ministers of State Governments and Union Territories was held on 30th January, 1997 at New Delhi to discuss the challanges and constraints involved in strengthening and upgrading agricultural marketing machinery in the country.

(b) The Conference discussed the issues related to agricultural marketing such, as Enforcement of Regulation, Development of Agricultural Produce Markets, Grading at Producers' level, Marketing Extension, Marketing Information Network, Training in agricultural marketing, Post-harvest management. Marketing of livestock and livestock products. Rural Storage, Panchayats as an instrument of marketing development, Implementation of Recommendations of the High Power Committee on agricultural marketing and other related issues.

(c) The conference was attended by 11 Ministers from the States of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar NCT of Delhi, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Rajasthan and West Bengal. Besides, Adviser to the Governor of Uttar Pradesh also attend the Conference.

(d) The recommendations of the Conference are given in the statement enclosed.

Statement

The recommendations of the Conference of Ministers dealing with Agricultural Marketing in States/ Union Territories held on 30th January, 1997 at New Delhi are the following :

(I) Rural markets/haats which are the first contact points for farmers to sell their agricultural produce should be equipped with adequate infrastructural facilities as would be laid down by a Sub-Committee of Ministers dealing with Agricultural Marketing and Services. The State Governments should also undertake development of rural periodic markets on priority basis through Panchayats, wherever possible by making adequate legal changes, if necessary, to provide better returns to the poor and marginal farmers in the rural areas.

(II) Agricultural Produce Markets should be developed according to a Master Plan, based on objective criteria after taking into consideration the role and importance of individual physical markets in the flow of agricultural produce. Further, in the preparation of the Master Plan, all market users should also be involved in decision making regarding size, location, layout, operational needs. etc.

(III) The trasnsactional methods i.e. method of sale, weighment and payment should be made transparent as they have got a direct bearing on prices and marketing costs. System of open auction as provided by the Laws must be enforced by all the market committees.

(IV) In the prevailing atmosphere of liberalisation and economic reforms in the country, efforts should be made to involve private sector in creating marketing infrastructure. Privatisation of some of the services such as garbage disposal, sanitation, collection of market fee, weighment of the produce, etc. may preferably be considered particularly in large urban wholesale markets.

(V) It is essential that new markets for livestock, meat, fish and poultry are set up and the existing ones are upgraded by the State Governments/Union Territory Administrations.

(VI) Marketing research, training and extension should form an essential ingredient for improving the operational efficiency of the markets and making them consumer oriented;

and the National Institute of Agricultural Marketing (NIAM), Jaipur and other Institutions should be increasingly involved to conduct studies/research and training on all aspects of agricultural marketing and consumer behaviour. Integration of these activities with State Level Organisations by NIAM should be strengthened. Publication of Quarterly Journal on Export of Agricultural commodities should be circulated to State Institutions by NIAM.

(VII) To facilitate farmers to take decisions for sale of their commodities, it is essential that marketing information network using IT (Information Technology) connecting all the important markets for foodgrains, fruits, vegetables, fish, livestock, etc. is set up. The information should be displayed on the electronic boards at prominent places in the market yards. This should also be broadcast in regional languages over All India Radio to give maximum benefit to the farmers. Further, a separate channel in Door Darshan for Agricultural Marketing be commenced. It should also be available on Internet.

(VIII) States should make all efforts to train farmers in post-harvest technology. It is also necessary to start extension services in post-harvest technology.

(IX) There is an urgent need to create infrastructural facilities like cleaning, washing, grading, packing and refrigerated transportation etc. and the private sector should also be involved in setting up grading and packing houses. The Central/State/Union Territory Administration should arrange soft loans to the private sector for setting up these facilities.

(X) The State Governments/Union Territories should make sincere efforts to implement the recommendations of the High Power Committee which have already been accepted by the Central Government in consultation with the State Governments/ Union Territories Administration. It is also essential that elections to the market committees/boards are held regularly. Wherever the Market Committees/Boards have been superseded, steps should be taken to conduct elections at the earliest.

(XI) As the scheme for setting up of rural godowns stands transferred to the State Governments/ UT Administration, it is imperative that adequate storage facilities are provided to the farmers for storage of agricultural and allied products, especially perishable items like fruits and vegetables by constructing rural godowns at strategic places. The scheme of providing pledge finance to the farmers by the Agricultural Produce Market Committees shall be extended to other States/ UT Administration, which have not yet introduced the scheme.

(XII) Instances have come to notice where funds of marketing boards are utilised by the State Governments for other purposes. The State Governments should utilise the funds only for development of agricultural produce markets and the marketing infrastructure.

(XIII) The Conference discussed at length and recognised the need for initiating schemes for improving markets and other infrastructural facilities in the States. Since the States do not have adequate funds, these very essential schemes should be taken up as Centrally Sponsored Schemes in the 9th Plan.

(XIV) To disseminate information to the State Marketing Board Agencies and also to ensure constant to and fro flow of information, periodic meetings will be held by the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment with such agencies. At the Agricultural Marketing Adviser level, the meeting will be held quarterly; at the Secretary's level, half - yearly and it will be held annually at the level of the Minister (RA&E).

Petroleum Products

2848. SHRI SULTAN SALAHUDDIN OWAISI : Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state :

(a) whether Indian Oil Corporation propose to market the petroleum products from the proposed refineries of Essar Oil Ltd. and Reliance Petroleum Ltd. under administered price mechanism;

(b) whether the products of companies would be priced in accordance with the price and terms of APM;

(c) the other terms and conditions of this agreement; and

(d) the manner in which this agreement is likely to meet the shortage of petroleum products in the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The proposed agreements of the Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. with Essar Oil Ltd. (EOL) and Reliance Petroleum Ltd. (RPL) envisage that the price payable and the terms of payment to EOL and RPL for products